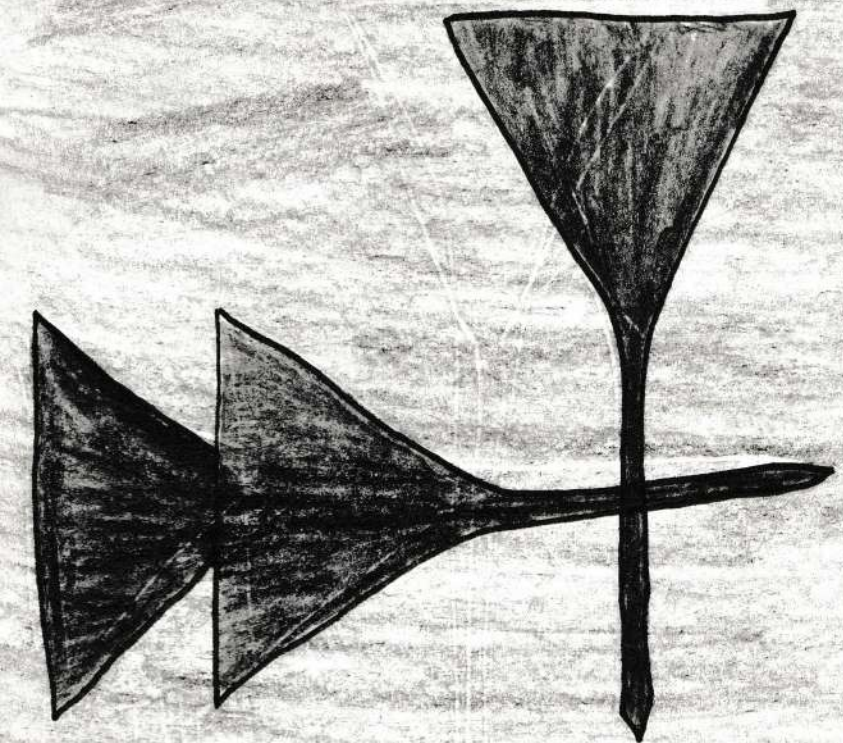
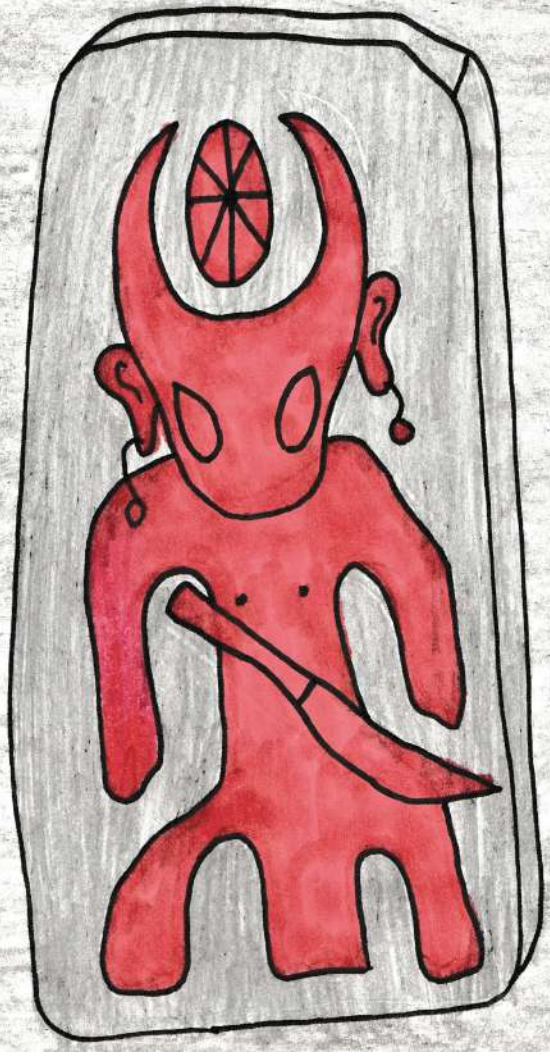
My little book of Akkadian Demons





THE SLEEPLESS MONKS IV

HUMBABA

Humbaba is a fierce warrior giant whose face is a maze resembling the coils of the intestines. Akkadian sources describe his voice and roar as flood, his mouth as fire, and his breath as death. His most notable feature is his large, unimaginably horrifying eyes, whose inescapable and irresistible gaze traps viewers in a labyrinth of divine terror, sometimes causing those who are caught in it to fall unconscious.

The cedar forest was a boundary between civilisation and savagery, mortals and the divine, and between life and death.

GUARDIAN OF BOUNDARIES

After his death, the severed head of Humbaba continues to retain supernatural powers, allowing those who wield it to harness the power of his gaze. For this reason, depictions of his head can be used to ward off evil, such as being placed on amulets which the deceased can wear to protect them as they journey into the afterlife. This reflects Humbaba's lesser-known position as the guardian of liminal spaces, such as territorial borders or the transition between life and death. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, the cedar forest was a boundary between civilisation and savagery, mortals and the divine, and between life and death. Historically, the cedar forests which grew on the Zagros mountains represented the boundary between the Mesopotamian and Elamite civilisations.

THE CEDAR FOREST

Enlil, one of the chief gods of the pantheon, created Humbaba to guard a vast forest of cedar trees sacred to him. In Sumerian, this forest is called "kur-giš-erin-kud," which roughly translates as "Land of the cut down cedar trees." Humbaba was created to prevent the further destruction of the living forest by humans and other mortals, particularly the inhabitants of Ancient Mesopotamia's cities, who often made long and perilous expeditions to distant lands to procure wood for building. Two such mortals were Gilgamesh and Enkidu, who slew and beheaded the demon.

The land of the cut down cedar trees, and the Zagros mountains.

LAMAŠTU

Lamastu, daughter of Anu, is likely the best represented ancient Akkadian demon. She is depicted with a heavy layer of hair, the head of a lion, the teeth and ears of a donkey, and the feet of a bird, often nursing animals such as pigs or dogs.

LAMAŠTU

SUMERIAN: DIMME

ANTI-MOTHER

While Lamaštu often drinks the blood of random male victims, she is most known for her targeted attacks on pregnant women and newborn infants. She can induce miscarriages by touching the belly of a pregnant woman seven times, and nurses infants with her fatal toxic substance while mothers are distracted. Lamaštu often affects mothers with what is now known as pre-eclampsia, a pregnancy complication which causes elevated blood pressure, shortness of breath caused by a buildup of fluid in the lungs, and damage to the kidneys and liver. Her motives are nothing short of "evil for the sake of evil."

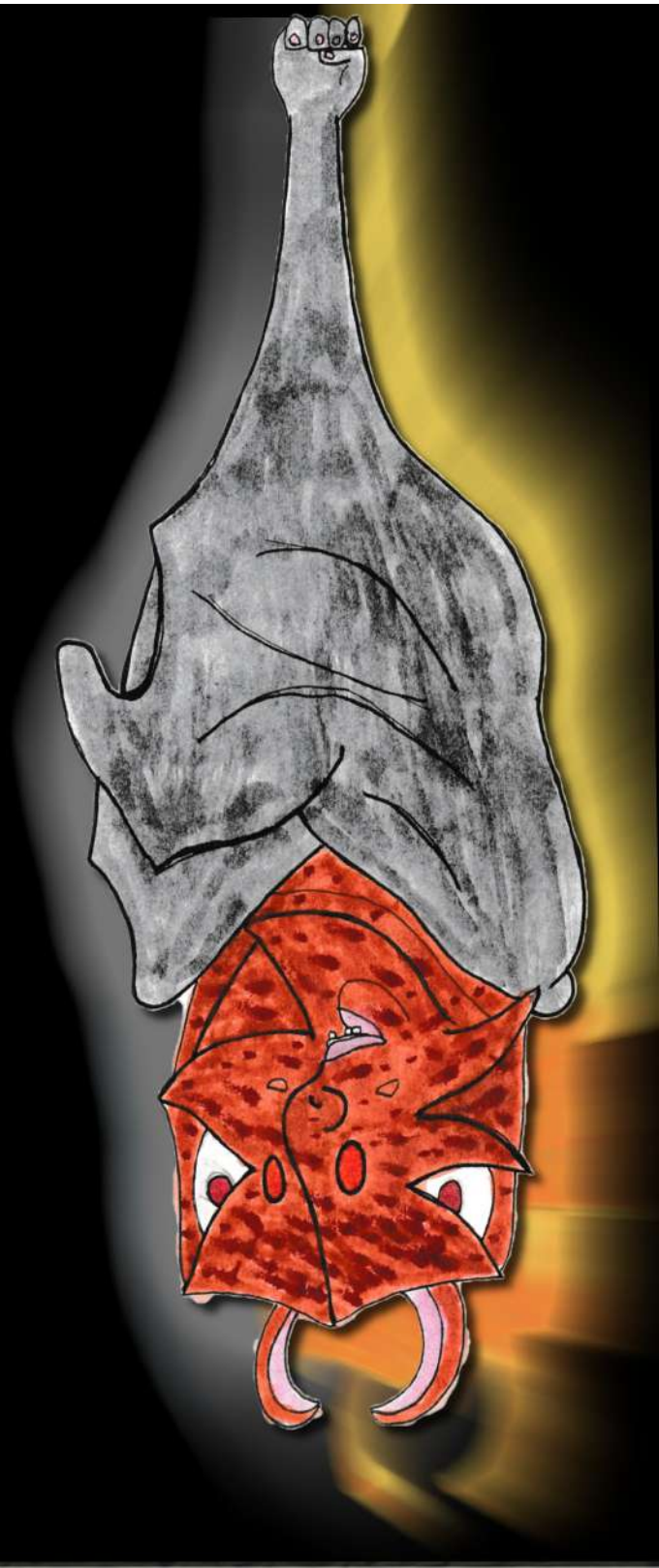
DEMON OR GODDESS?

Although Lamaštu spends most of her time in the underworld with other demons, some consider her to be a demon-like goddess because, unlike most demons, she is completely autonomous and does not answer to the will of any deity. Despite this, Pazuzu, the god of the demons of the wind, is sometimes able to convince Lamaštu to return to the underworld and is consequently often invoked in pregnancy amulets.

APOTROPAIC FUNCTIONS

Although Lamaštu was feared ubiquitously across Sumer and Akkad, her relationship with humanity was not absolutely antagonistic. In one anti-witchcraft ritual, participants are instructed to place a Lamaštu figurine inside a decorated skull, preventing witches on their way to the underworld from causing harm. Through placing her inside a space representing the underworld or death, Lamaštu's fearsomeness can be leveraged to scare away other malevolent forces which also occupy that space.

Asag means "disease" or "plague" in Sumerian and some dialects of Akkadian. It is described as a hideous monster with a deformed face, sometimes made of stone. The Asag is the personification of random pointless disease and sickness that is not ordained by the gods and serves no purpose. It is often associated with fever and migraines.



THE ASAG

ASAKKU

The random and disordered nature of the Asag's attacks reflects the demon's intimate connection with Chaos and the primordial ocean, which are continually held back by the forces of order. The Asag is often invoked alongside Namtar, who represents orderly just disease and death, as decreed by the gods.

"The Asag is often associated with fever and migraines."

LUGAL-E

The Sumerian epic poem Lugal-e describes the Asag's birth. In this poem, Heaven and Earth copulate to form the Asag, who, not stopping to drink his mother's milk, immediately falls upon the inhabitants of the earth and carves out an empire of pestilence and disease. The mountains bear the Asag an army of stone demons made of diorite, hematite, and copper, which the Asag commands to topple the kingdoms of the Earth.

"The plants hail the Asag as the world's new ruler."

LUGAL-E, CONTINUED

The Asag's triumph happens so quickly that, by the time the word reaches heaven, the era of the gods seems to have been overturned, and the plants hail the Asag as the world's new ruler. Upon hearing the news, the gods abandon heaven, all except the brave Ninurta, who resolves to slay the Asag.

THE ASAG IS SUBDUED

After initially being repelled, Ninurta subdues the Asag, tears it apart like grass, and declares the Asag to be nothing more than stone. However, in defeating the Asag, the chaotic primordial waters of the Tigris are unleashed, causing flooding. Nunrta uses the stones of the defeated demon and its warriors to build a dam, restoring order while simultaneously inventing irrigation.

Despite Ninurta's victory, incantations and amulets reveal that Sumerian and Akkadian people still feared the Asag and sought defence against it. The ultimate potential of the sickness demon seems to be held back for now, but leaks of varying proportion still manage to seep through.

Interestingly, many online sites like Wikipedia report that the Asag is so hideous his presence boils water and the fish in it, but this isn't true and they made that up (investigate the sources if you don't believe me).

THE ASAG'S STONE WARRIORS

ARDAT-LILI

In Akkadian, the word Ardat is derived from "Ardatu," a young unmarried woman or a handmaiden. Since "lili" is the plural of Lilitu, or Lilith in Hebrew, some scholars regard Ardat-lili as "Liltu's handmaidens" or "Lilith's maidens." Others have observed that Lilitu means something like "stormy wind spirit." Ardat-lili are then malevolent spirits of unmarried women grouped in with other wind demons like Liltu, but most likely not working for her. Instead, Ardat-Lili work under the goddess Ishtar in some texts.

FROM GRIEF TO MALICE

Ardat-lili are aggressive and dangerous ghosts of women who have died without ever having been with a lover or bearing children. The grief and frustration of these spirits drive them to haunt sleeping men, sometimes attempting to engage in intercourse with them, causing nocturnal emissions. Alternatively, they may seduce waking men and cause harm, sickness, or even death through the encounter. Nocturnal epilepsy and Gelastic epilepsy were sometimes attributed to Ardat-lili.

Exorcising Ardat-Lili

Amulets and incantations are often used to ward off Ardart-Lili. If these do not work, priests may perform ritual exorcisms wedding the Ardat-Lili to the male victim as a ghostly wife to appease the spirit, freeing her from her grief and allowing her to rest peacefully.

Ardat-Lili are said to enter their victims' homes through windows.

VICTIMS OF PATRIARCHY?

In my own interpretation, these spirits seem to be the result of a patriarchal society which viewed women as nothing more than wives and vessels for child rearing. I hope that one day the Ardat-lili may free themselves from their internalised misogyny and realise that they don't need a man to make the afterlife worthwhile. Perhaps future exorcisms can try exposing the Ardat-Lili to Feminist theory, rather than wedding them to a man they hardly know.

Translating into English roughly as “Any Evil,” Mimma Lemnu was a placeholder name used to dispel any ailment caused by any spirit, or any spell cast by any witch. While it was less precise and thus less effective than an incantation which directly invoked the name of the afflicting demon, it was often included in exorcisms which had an uncertain cause. Contemporary texts and figurines personify Any Evil as a single demonic entity, a male demon with the head of a bull.

For example, let's say you have really bad migraines. The priests have tried exorcising many different demons, and nothing is working. Time to pull out the trump card.

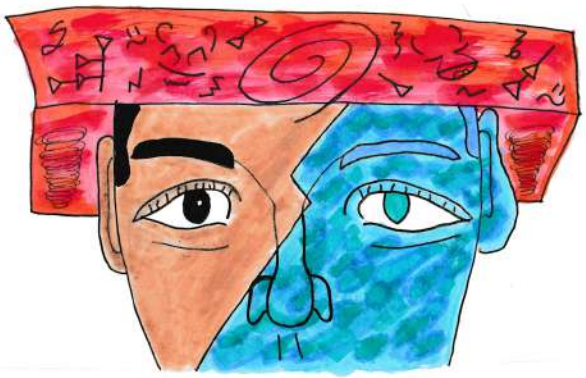
1

2

Make a clay figurine of Mimma Lemnu, writing his name on his left shoulder (I'm not sure if he knows the Latin alphabet, so use cuneiform to be safe), and place him inside the hoof of a bull.

3

Then, with the Sun god Samas as your witness, sprinkle Mimma Lemnu with Naptha, fish oil, and donkey piss. You then sit him down beside the head of the affected patient.



The following incantation must then be repeated at sunrise, noon, and sunset for the next three days: "Whoever you are, Mimma Lemnu, an evil, an evil ghost, an evil alû-demon [...] , an illness, headache, insomnia, [...] or any evil that can seize a human, that has been fastened to my sides and keeps persecuting me day and night:

The illness of my head I have given to your head, the illness of my temple I have given to your temple, the illness of my skull I have given to your skull [...] May the [south, north, east, and west] wind blow to me, but you must not blow to me. May this [figurine] be your abode […] your dwelling place. You must not stalk me again."

After the third day, take Mimma Lemnu and bury him in a secluded area. Turn around so you can no longer see the burial site and recite the incantation one last time. Do not look back on your way home.

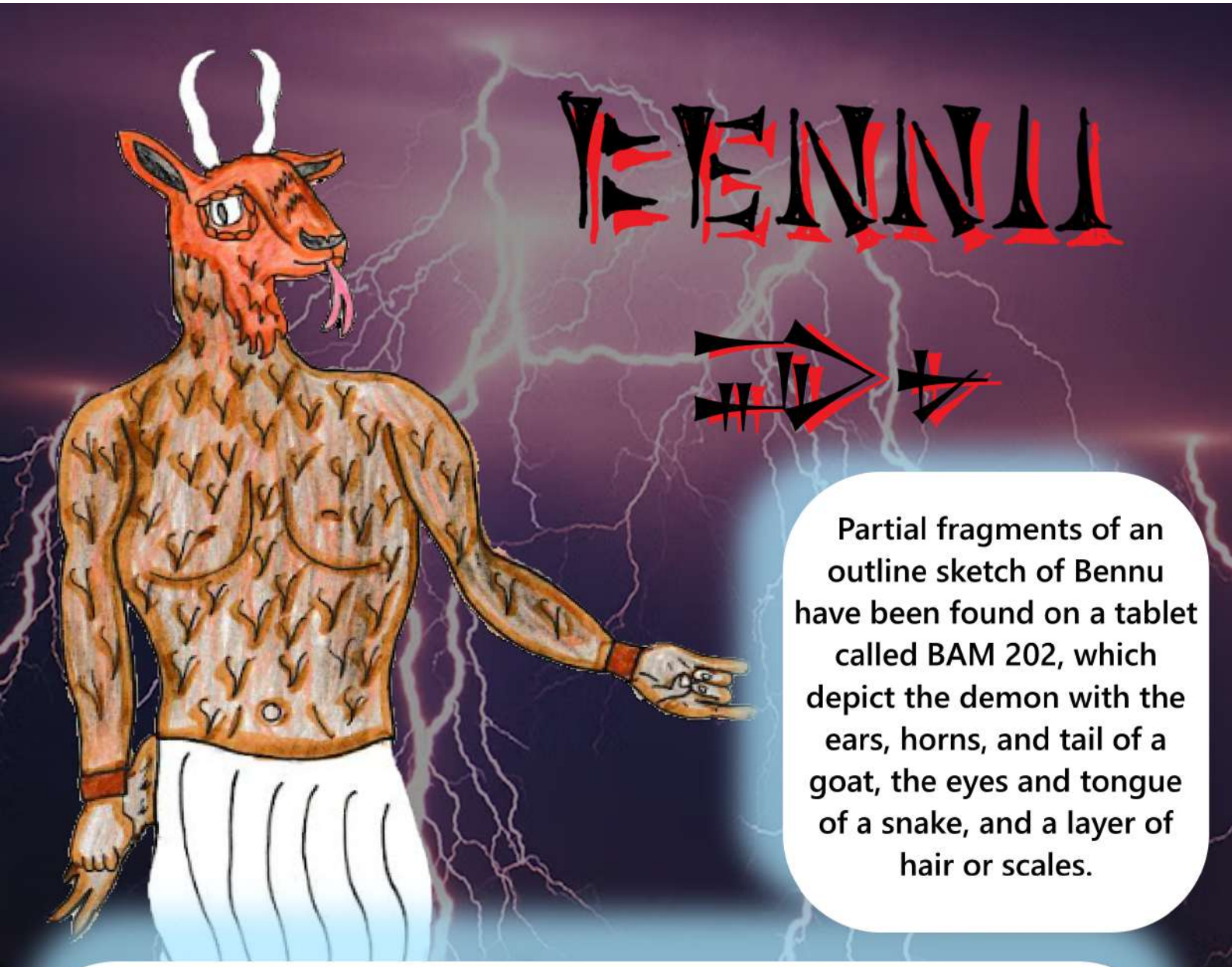
Just as the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier honours both one and many anonymous soldiers, or the Athenian Temple to the Unknown God in the book of Acts recognised any god whose identity was unknown, this name and figurine can embody one thing, or many. Mimma Lemnu is used to give a name to anything evil for ritualistic purposes.

Oh no! The ritual has not been properly preformed!

Can you identify the errors in the ritual to exorcise the demon?

THE RITUAL

BENNU



Partial fragments of an outline sketch of Bennu have been found on a tablet called BAM 202, which depict the demon with the ears, horns, and tail of a goat, the eyes and tongue of a snake, and a layer of hair or scales.

Bennu is both the Akkadian word for epilepsy and one of the demons which cause it. Although modern societies may distinguish between the illness and the demon that inflicts it, to the Akkadians they were inseparable. Bennu is under the authority of the moon god, Sin.

Although Bennu is a demon from the Neo-Assyrian period around the 7th century BC, 1500 years after Akkad, I have decided to include him here anyway. A dialect of Akkadian was spoken in the Neo-Assyrian period, so Bennu is arguably an Akkadian demon insofar as the people who feared him spoke a version of Akkadian.

Being derived from the Akkadian word "sibtu", which means "to seize" or "to possess," Bennu is associated with being physically grabbed and shaken by a demon.

As with any modern concept retroactively applied to the past, Bennu does not entirely align with our current understanding of epilepsy. He is also credited with twitching, convulsions, and can jump from one victim to the next. Bennu creates Temu sanu, an altered state of mind which is considered deranged or strange.

According to BAM 202, Bennu can be exorcised by wrapping the hair of a monkey, a pomegranate, and a wild apple together with several aromatic plant roots and their sap in the skin of a female baby goat, binding it with the tendons of a dead cow, and placing it around the neck of the affected person.

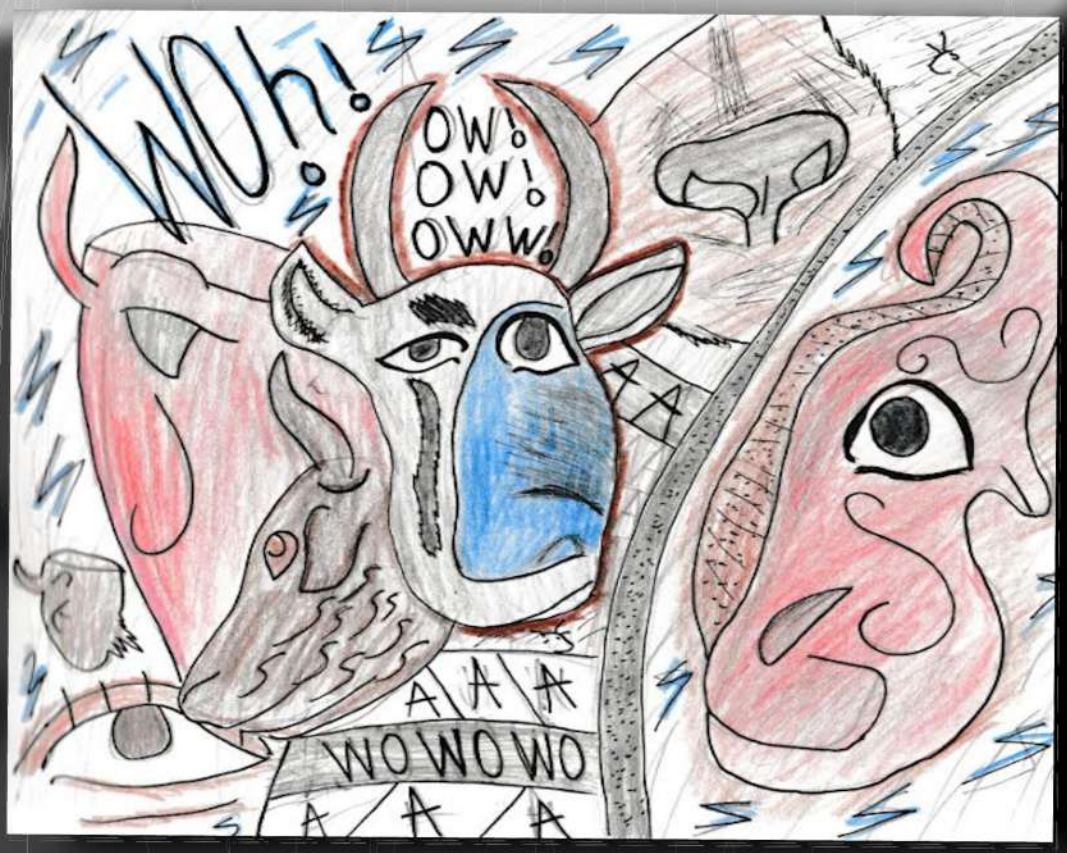
Bennu-Epilepsy is contrasted against Miqtu-Epilepsy (known more commonly by its Sumerian translation, Antasubba-epilepsy), which is caused by Ardat-Lili or Miqtu demons. Although some scholars argue that Bennu is a class of Miqtu demons, it nonetheless receives a distinct categorisation. (I.e., not all epileptic seizures are caused by Bennu.)

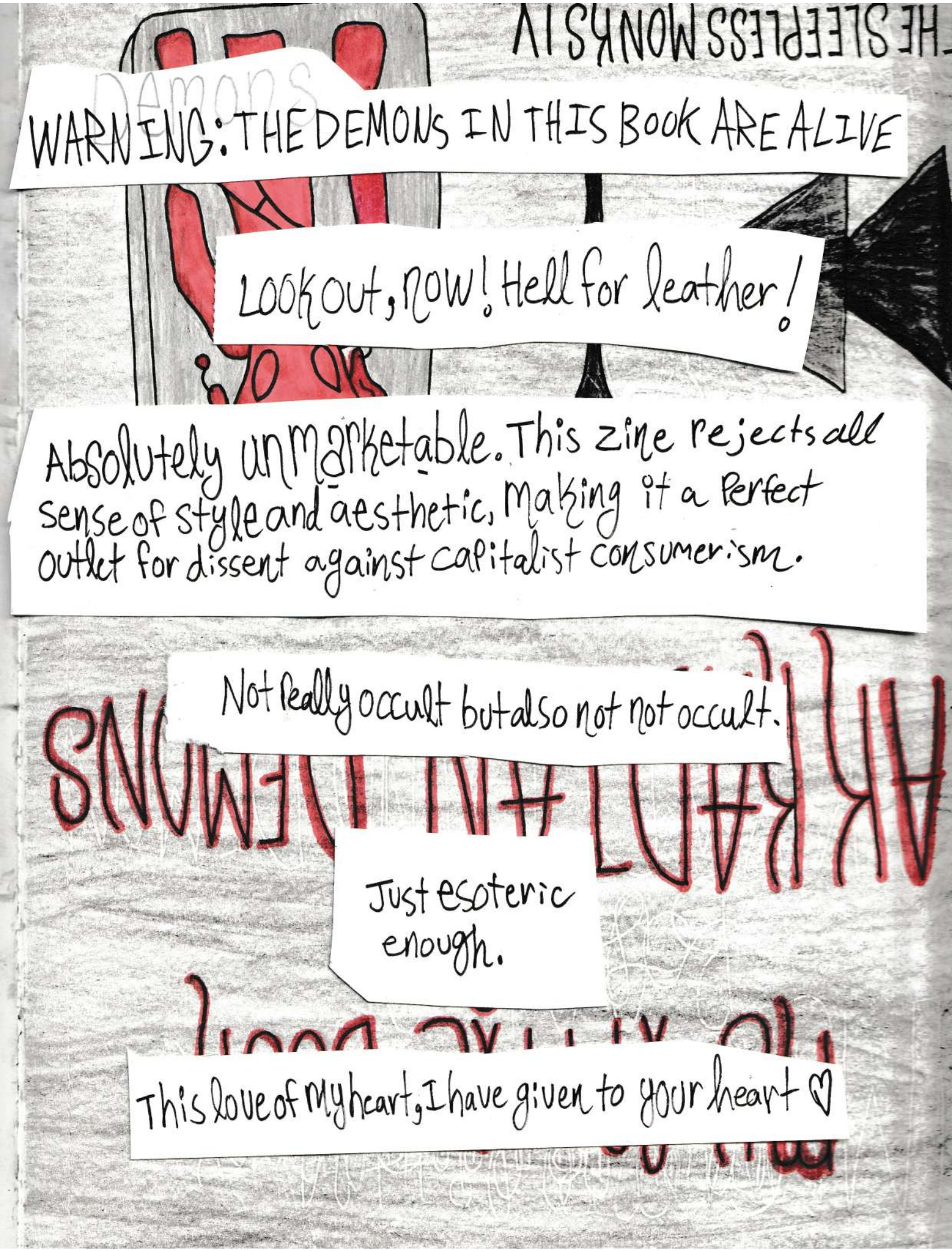
The primary difference between the two conditions lies in the demon which causes it. Some sources report that bennu-epilepsy has a slightly more favourable prognosis, being less likely to cause death. Others report that Bennu causes a more pronounced prodromal period preceding the seizure. (However, no research exists suggesting a correlation between prodrome or aura strength and the severity of a seizure.)

Remember, this is a horror zine.

While scholars understand epilepsy to be a function of Bennu, I personally think that a lot of the descriptions found in Akkadian tablets also resemble the symptoms of tic disorders. For instance, the tablet BAM 202 states, “If a man continually jerks in his bed, he cries like a goat, he groans, he shudders, and he talks a lot, the hand of bennu [has seized him].”

My argument is also supported by the idea that Bennu is contagious; instances of people with tics being influenced by or adopting the tics of others through a phenomenon known as “tic contagion” are well documented.




WARNING: THE DEMONS IN THIS BOOK ARE ALIVE
Look out, now! Hell for leather!
Absolutely unmarketable. This zine rejects all sense of style and aesthetic, making it a perfect outlet for dissent against capitalist consumerism.
Not really occult but also not not occult.
Just esoteric enough.
This love of my heart, I have given to your heart ♡